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SUBJECT Zbigniew Brzezinski Interviewed

ANNOUNCER: From the Roosevelt Room in the White House in Washington, where President Carter meets with his closest advisers, Issues & Answers brings you Zbigniew Brzezinski, Assistant to the President for National Security and Foreign Policy Affairs. Mr. Brzezinski will be interviewed by ABC News White House correspondent Sam Donaldson and Issues & Answers chief correspondent Bob Clark.

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BOB CLARK: The situation of Iran appears to have taken a potentially dangerous new turn, with the removal of the hostages from the embassy to other locations and the threats that the Americans who died in the rescue mission, their bodies, will not be returned without concessions from us. Can you tell us how seriously you view the situation at the moment and just how much you know about it?

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: Let me say first of all that what the President ordered to be done was morally right and politically justified. We needed to take this action to help to relieve the situation. Our countrymen needed help. We had a moral obligation to do what we could to help them. And we will persist in this effort.

Politically, the region is stagnating and Iran's political situation is deteriorating. It is important to bring this issue to resolution.

What is now happening in Iran is unclear. We have no confirmation that the hostages have been removed. It is not clear, if they're removed, in whose custody they would be re-

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tained. In any case, we continue to hold the Iranian government responsible for the safety and well-being of these people.

Insofar as the bodies are concerned, President Bani-Sadr said, and honorably, that they will be retained -- removed and returned to us immediately. We hold him to his word, and we'll see whether the events, literally within the next hours or days, justify our faith in his words.

CLARK: If the hostages have indeed been removed to other locations, how seriously would you view this? And is there anything we can do about it?

BRZEZINSKI: Obviously, there's nothing we can do about it, because we do not have control over the hostages. Much depends on whose custody they will be retained in.

We will continue our efforts, all efforts, to obtain their release. And I believe that one of the very important lessons to be drawn from the events of the last few days by everyone concerned is that the United States and the President of the United States is prepared to do all that is necessary to obtain their release, and will persist in these efforts -- I repeat, will persist in these efforts.

SAM DONALDSON: Well, Dr. Brzezinski, he can do all that is necessary, but what can he do? He's played a card. It failed. You said it was an honorable card, and I'm not arguing with that. But it failed.

What next?

BRZEZINSKI: First of all, there is the longer-term track, which involves collective actions designed to bring home to the Iranians, and particularly to those Iranians who are responsible for the fate of their country, that the continued political paralysis and international isolation of Iran which the hostage situation is engendering is bringing ruin to Iran itself. The country is gradually disintegrating.

DONALDSON: Now, you have said that for a long time.

BRZEZINSKI: ...are falling apart.

DONALDSON: Excuse me. You've said that for a long time.

BRZEZINSKI: Its enemies are gathering force. Responsible Iranians have to contemplate the consequences of this for Iran. And if a peaceful resolution is to be found, they have to play their role.

[Confusion of voices]

DONALDSON: If I may just ask about that. You and the President and other Administration officials have made that point for a long time, but it seemed to get us nowhere. Apparently, you didn't believe enough in that point to let it play out. You took this action which failed.

BRZEZINSKI: We have made that point for a long time. But we are playing the situation here that unfolds slowly. We have adopted certain steps ourselves to bring home to Iran that Iran's well-being is being adversely affected by what it had done. More recently, these steps have been strengthened by allied solidarity. The fact that Iran is increasingly ostracized in the world is a psychological, political, and economic situation which no responsible Iranian can ignore.

[Confusion of voices]

BRZEZINSKI: If you could perhaps agree on which of you is going to ask questions, it would make it easier for me to answer.

DONALDSON: We have the same question. Are you now conceding that it is a long-term proposition, that those hostages will be there a long time?

BRZEZINSKI: We're not conceding anything of the sort. What I'm saying is that one has to have a long-term strategy for dealing with a problem which may last a long time or which might be resolved more rapidly. In addition to that, one has the obligation to consider alternative courses of action which might resolve this problem more promptly.

The rescue operation which the President ordered undertaken was planned, literally, from the first week of the hostage seizure. We undertook it at a time when we thought it was opportune. We certainly intend to work peacefully, if possible, to resolve this problem.

CLARK: But hasn't the failure of that rescue mission effectively ended any prospect for early release of the hostages?

BRZEZINSKI: I would not draw that conclusion. I hope that it brings home to Teheran a very important message, which until a week ago the Iranians were inclined to discount. And the message is this: Do not scoff at American power. Do not scoff at American reach. It is in Iran's interest to resolve this problem peacefully. It is our preference to resolve it peacefully.

CLARK: Do you think the failure of the rescue mission

and the angry reaction of the Iranians to that mission increases or decreases the prospects for use of military power on our part?

BRZEZINSKI: I cannot answer that question because I do not know exactly how the balance of rationality versus irrationality plays out in Teheran. My hope is that there are enough Iranian leaders within the revolution, which we recognize now is a fact, who are concerned about Iran's well-being and realize that the perpetuation of this situation is likely to produce conditions for Iran which might be disastrous for its national well-being.

CLARK: Well, you speak of the support we're not receiving from our allies. But hardly anyone believes that economic sanctions are going to effect early release of the hostages. Wouldn't you agree with that?

BRZEZINSKI: I'm not sure whether everybody feels that way. Our allies have concluded that a somewhat different sequence of steps than we would have preferred is now to be applied, namely, political sanctions first, followed by economic sanctions.

Our collective judgment is that this is the best way to bring home to the Iranians the reality that they live in a very vulnerable part of the world, to remind them that in the past they have been subject to foreign domination, particularly Russian Soviet, and that they are therefore creating conditions which may end up being very painful to themselves.

DONALDSON: Well, Dr. Brzezinski, are you saying, in all of what you have said so far, that we are going to attempt another type of military operation against Iran or -- in an attempt to free the hostages? And if so, how can we do that?

BRZEZINSKI: I am weighing my words very carefully. I'm saying that we are pursuing a collective policy designed to bring home to the Iranian leaders, those who are responsible, the advantages of a peaceful solution, a peaceful resolution to an illegal, abhorrent act which the entire international community rejects.

We reserve the ourselves the right to pursue every course of action open to us to redress a situation in which we are the victims of an illegal, indeed of a belligerent act.

DONALDSON: But to do what? Let me say to you that Secretary Brown, Defense Secretary Brown, yesterday, in discussing this problem, said one of the reasons why you didn't mine the harbors or attempt the blockade was because that would internationalize the problem, perhaps widen it, and perhaps not have the desired effect.

Has that changed today? Could you go back now to a blockade strategy?

BRZEZINSKI: I will not discuss specific options, because specific options depend, in their utility or disutility, on the particular circumstances in which they are applied. All I can say is that the United States has a political and a moral obligation to do what it can to redress this issue.

We undertook the rescue operation knowing full well that it was risky. We calculated very precisely its chances of success. We felt they were sufficiently high to warrant this activity, because we have a moral obligation to help our people. We also have a political obligation to try to bring this problem to an end if the Iranians themselves are not capable of reaching the requisite decisions.

DONALDSON: ...Secretary Vance had very grave doubts about this operation, and Secretary Brown had some also. What were they?

BRZEZINSKI: Everyone recognized that the operation was risky. We also know from history that there are moments in which a certain amount of risk has to be taken. We calculated very closely what the risks were. We knew that we were undertaking something which involved risk. We also knew that the stakes involved were very high.

After a full weighing of this, after many exercises, after many tests, after weeks of meticulous planning, after extensive discussions in the National Security Council, in which all of the President's advisers took part, the President took the right decision, took the courageous decision.

DONALDSON: Was it just bad luck...

BRZEZINSKI: And I believe that this is a decision which the American people support.

I will say, for myself, that I am proud to have been associated with it. I'm proud of what we tried to do. I'm particularly proud of the American men who volunteered to go and to do what was necessary to be done.

DONALDSON: Was it just bad luck, then, that it failed? It was not a question of a bad plan?

BRZEZINSKI: I believe the plan was good. The plan was extremely complex, because of the difficulties involved, the enormous distances involved. Some of the precautions taken by the other side had to be taken into account.

In an operation of this sort, you always have to have luck on your side, to some extent, to succeed. And bad luck can abort a situation. This situation was aborted initially without

any loss of life. The loss of life, unfortunately, took place during the evacuation process, due to an air collision. These things happen sometimes. Yesterday's headline...

CLARK: Dr. Brzezinski...

BRZEZINSKI: ...spoke not only of eight American dead, but of some 140 Englishmen dead who died in an airplane crash in the Canary Islands. These things do happen.

CLARK: Dr. Brzezinski, our allies, as you well know, have been concerned from the start that we would take some sort of military action that would inflame the situation and escalate the risk of confrontation, even war, with Iran or the Soviet Union. They now seem more concerned than ever after this rescue mission and its failure.

If we do get to the point where we have to take -- feel we have to take military action, would you inform the allies so there would not be this bad feeling again?

BRZEZINSKI: Let me differentiate, first of all, between a sustained military operation and a rescue operation, which is necessary...

CLARK: I'm thinking of something like the seeding of mines in Iranian harbors...

BRZEZINSKI: ...an action of a more sustained kind would be an action which would lend itself to advance consultation.

Insofar as allied reactions are concerned, let me say this: Our initial judgments are that public opinion abroad understands the necessity for a rescue operation. And indeed, some of our allies themselves have undertaken such rescue operations. The Germans did, the French did.

Secondly, the President has already received a number of extremely warm personal messages from his associates, the leaders of our principal allies, indicating their close support and understanding for the action we took.

CLARK: We want to talk more in a minute or two about the extreme concern of some of our allies about military escalation in the Persian Gulf area.

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SAM DONALDSON: Dr. Brzezinski, you said that you would consult our allies in a sustained military operation if that is something that the President contemplates. I assume you also

would consult Congress.

BRZEZINSKI: Of course.

DONALDSON: In advance.

BRZEZINSKI: Of course.

DONALDSON: Let me ask you a question about the bodies that we asked earlier on. It is said now by the Ayatollah Khomeini that we have to pay a price, some sort of price to get the bodies back of our dead. Is that acceptable?

BRZEZINSKI: If that is true, it's another step down in the moral degradation of a country which has had, actually, a very impressive, occasionally glorious, tradition. In addition to trading in hostages, if the Iranian authorities now begin to trade in bodies, I think it is an indication of the depth to which they have sunk. And this will further contribute to their international condemnation and isolation.

DONALDSON: But, in fact, I take it there's nothing we could do about it. Or would we be willing to do something if they asked for a price?

BRZEZINSKI: Your questions keep pointing to the fundamental dilemma we face -- namely, that a group of terrorists, apparently with some complicity of the government, are holding our fellow countrymen. Our efforts over the past few months have been designed to obtain their release. These efforts will persist. We'll use whatever is necessary to obtain their release. I believe we have demonstrated in the last week how determined we are and how far we can reach.

DONALDSON: Well, is the answer to my question no?

BRZEZINSKI: This applies to the bodies. Obviously, we cannot get the bodies out, any more easily than the hostages.

DONALDSON: Would we pay a price for them?

BRZEZINSKI: We are not in the body-buying business. We are willing to do what is necessary, through intermediaries or directly, to obtain a dignified and human resolution of the body issue, if that is a new issue the Iranians wish to create. I find it, simply as a human being, from a moral point of view, degrading to think that anyone would do that. Traditionally, even enemies return the bodies of warriors.

I hope we don't embark on excessive speculation on this subject until we know for a fact that this degrading reality confronts us.

CLARK: If we can return to the question of our allies' concern that the situation in the whole Persian Gulf area is getting out of hand and that we may, indeed, be heading toward a very serious confrontation with the Soviet Union. Is -- will our decision on whether or not to take any military action, will it be based on a very careful appraisal of how the Soviets might react to this?

BRZEZINSKI: I think it's important to look at the situation in the region in a wider perspective. We're dealing not only with the hostage issue in Iran, we're dealing with the progressive disintegration of Iran as a political entity. The country's polarized and, to some extent, increasingly radicalized. At the same time, the Soviets are in the process of occupying Afghanistan.

We are dealing, therefore, with a significant expansion of Soviet power southward. This does pose, potentially, a significant danger to the Persian Gulf, a region of vital interest to Western Europe and to Japan and to us. This is why there is a wider dimension, a strategic dimension to this problem.

CLARK: Well, there are many who think it also poses a very significant danger to us. And even Barry Goldwater this past week, who has been one of the leading hawks in Congress over the week -- over the years, has said that he fears we are being pulled toward a confrontation with Russia and a war for which we are not prepared.

BRZEZINSKI: I think it's important to remember that since World War II, there first emerged the central strategic zone of Western Europe. The second central strategic zone for us was the Far East. In both cases, we have permanently stationed American forces. The third central strategic zone is Southwest Asia, the Persian Gulf. There are no forces there. Iran, Turkey, to some extent Pakistan, Afghanistan is a buffer with a protective shield. That shield has now been pierced.

As a consequence, our friends in the region and our vital interests in this third central strategic zone are beginning to be threatened. This is why this is becoming a strategic problem.

CLARK: You say there are no forces today in the Persian Gulf area. Isn't that the whole nub of the problem, that we may be moving toward a war for which we simply are not prepared?

BRZEZINSKI: Well, first of all, it's not true to say that there are no American forces in the area. We have taken, under the President's leadership, in the course of the last several months, deliberate steps to argument our military presence.

We now have two aircraft carrier task forces in the area, with considerable air punch. We are developing a search capability so that we can inject our forces rapidly. We are intensifying our political/military consultations with some of the countries concerned. We're working closely with those who are not directly involved in our military efforts, but would benefit from them.

For example, Saudi Arabia, who is a staunch friend and in whose leadership we have high confidence,...

CLARK: But Saudi Arabia is also very concerned about our taking any military action that might upset...

BRZEZINSKI: You didn't let me complete my thought.

Saudi Arabia, which is a staunch friend and which has a leadership in whom we have high confidence, has been extremely helpful to us on international economic issues. We recognize the need to create an environment which is secure, while respecting the Arab desire to protect their sovereignty, through the absence of foreign bases on their soil.

DONALDSON: Dr. Brzezinski, some of the American allies and some of the American public have been saying that President Carter is really not competent, and that this is another indication that he's not up to the job. I assume that you do not accept that. But does that not complicate the problem now of working with our allies and also of trying to formulate a new policy?

BRZEZINSKI: You know, that's such an absurd statement that I don't think one should spend too much time refuting it, but I'll take a minute or two just to remind you that this is the President who obtained the Panama Canal treaties, against enormous odds. This is the President who obtained the first peace treaty ever between Israel and an Arab country. This is the President which moved us in a position to implement genuine reconciliation in Southern Africa on the basis of majority rule. This is the President who bit the bullet on normalization of relations with China, thereby very greatly improving our geo-strategic position in the world. This is the President who provided the leadership to strengthen NATO, through a long-term development program. This is the President who has taken difficult decisions to increase the defense budget in peacetime.

It's a pretty good record in three years, much better than some of our predecessors.

DONALDSON: I did not want to interrupt you because I thought it was only fair for you to be able to make that case. But the polls seem to suggest that people are not confident in this President's ability to handle this particular crisis. That curve has been going down.

Let me ask you the auxiliary question. Wasn't one of the reasons Mr. Carter took the action that you took this past week because of the political factor, that he saw he had to do something?

BRZEZINSKI: Absolutely not. We took it because with the refinement of the rescue plan, at some point we concluded that the rescue plan was a viable option. Once the negotiating track had run out of steam, towards the end of March, and once we had indications from the other side that they were determined to continue holding the hostages indefinitely, we knew we had a narrow window left for the rescue option before the nights became too short and also the temperature too hot for an operation which included air-breathing machines over long territory.

DONALDSON: Well, you do seem to agree, in what you have said just then and previously, that the rescue option is no longer there.

BRZEZINSKI: No, I do not agree that the rescue option is not there. I'll not speculate on rescue options.

One particular aspect of that rescue option has obviously been compromised. But I will not speculate on what can be done. I will only repeat what I have said many times before. Let everyone draw an important lesson from this. This President and this country will do what is necessary, and we have the means for doing it. And one setback doesn't shape the future.

DONALDSON: We wouldn't go to war with Iran, would we?

BRZEZINSKI: We will take actions which are appropriate. We prefer to resolve this problem peacefully through collective pressure. We hope, as I have said many times on this program, the Iranians will reach the right conclusion. But we are not going to sit indefinitely and have belligerent acts imposed upon us.

CLARK: The 15 diplomats who have been held hostage for the past two months in Bogota, Colombia apparently have been removed from the embassy there this morning and are en route somewhere by plane. Can you tell us what you know about that?

BRZEZINSKI: Yes. We are very hopeful that within hours there will be a resolution, a positive resolution of this issue. And we expect to have good news, including our own principal representative, very, very shortly.

CLARK: Is this some sort of a compromise that has been struck with the militants or terrorists who have held them so that some of their leader -- their imprisoned leaders would be released from jail?

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BRZEZINSKI: The Colombian government was responsible for handling these negotiations, and I do not wish to pre-empt the specific information that will be released at the time when the good news -- and I trust it will be good news for all of us -- is made public.

CLARK: Do you know whether it is true that some of the diplomats are being flown to Cuba?

BRZEZINSKI: It may be the case. But I don't want to go beyond confirming the fact that I think good news will shortly be released.

DONALDSON: By the way, back to Iran. Iran is claiming that the government of Iraq has been overthrown and its president been killed. Do you know anything about that?

BRZEZINSKI: I haven't heard any information to confirm that. I don't believe that Radio Teheran has an established standard of accuracy and veracity.

DONALDSON: Another question on the hostages. The militant terrorists are once again threatening to try them. What would be our response?

BRZEZINSKI: Our position on this subject has been known previously. I believe publicly on November 20th of last year. We stand by that. And the action we undertook last week probably reinforces the credibility of our position.

CLARK: Thank you very much, Dr. Brzezinski for being with us on Issues and Answers.